

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6423

E.O. 11652/ N/A
TAGS PINT, AR
SUBJECT DECISION STILL PENDING CONCERNING THE "SCHEME OF POWER"

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SUMMARY. TWO WEEKS INTO PRESIDENT VIDELA'S
"SECOND TERM" AND GENERAL VIOLAS ACCESSION TO
THE MILITARY JUNTA, IT IS APPARENT THAT NOT ALL
THE "GRAY AREAS" IN THE "SCHEME OF POWER" HAVE BEEN
WORKED OUT BY THE MILITARY SERVICES. THE DIVISION
OF POWER BETWEEN THE JUNTA AND THE PRESIDENCY IS NOT
YET CLEAR AND PROBABLY WILL REQUIRE MORE THAN A FEW WEEKS
BEFORE THE PICTURE BECOMES CLARIFIED. SOME OBSERVERS
SEE VIDELAS POWER AS REDUCED. VIDELAS PLANS ARE
DEPENDENT ON CONTINUED SUPPORT FROM THE ARMY AND HIS
OLD COMRADE IN ARMS VIOLA, BUT THE SPLIT VOTE
RESULTING IN THE CHOICE OF VIOLA AS VIDELAS SUCCESSOR
AND THE DELAYS IN RESOLVING PENDING ISSUES SUGGEST
THAT VIOLA COULD BE ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES IN
CONSOLIDATING HIS CONTROL OVER THE ARMY INSTITUTION.
MEANWHILE, ADMIRAL MASSERA PLOUGHS AHEAD WITH HIS OWN
POLITICAL PLANS. END SUMMARY.

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1. THERE WAS THE USUAL LYRICISM IN THE MEDIA ACCOMPANYING
THE INAUGURAL OF THE SECOND STAGE OF THE NATIONAL RE-
ORGANIZATION PROCESS WITH LT GENERAL VIOLA SUCCEEDING
PRESIDENT VIDELA IN THE ARMY COMMAND AND IN THE JUNTA.
THE EMPHASIS IN THE PRESS HAS BEEN ON THE "SMOOTH
TRANSITION" AND THE "CONTINUITY OF THE PROCESS." THE
ROTATION OF ARMY COMMANDERS HAVE BEEN PORTRAYED AS A

GUARANTEE AGAINST DESPOTIC MILITARY CAUDILLISMO AND A REMINDER THAT THERE IS AN INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS AT WORK. THIS CONCEPT HAS BEEN REINFORCED FURTHER BY THE MODIFICATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S BASIC DOCUMENT RECENTLY INTRODUCED BY THE JUNTA AUGUST 4 ESTABLISHING THE RULES BY WHICH FUTURE PRESIDENTS WILL BE ELECTED. UNDER THIS WRITTEN CODE, VIDELA WILL REMAIN IN THE PRESIDENCY UNTIL MARCH 1981 AND HIS SUCCESSOR IS TO BE AGREED UPON UNANIMOUSLY BY THE MILITARY JUNTA SIX MONTHS BEFORE. VIDELA WILL NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR A THIRD PRESIDENTIAL TERM AFTER 1981. THE PRESIDENT CAN BE REMOVED ANY TIME BY A UNANIMOUS VOTE BY THE JUNTA.

2. THE NEW MODIFICATION (SEE REFTEL B) INCIDENTALLY PROVIDE THAT VIDELA'S SUCCESSOR WILL ALSO BE "A HIGH RANKING RETIRED OFFICER OF THE ARMED FORCES" DESIGNATED BY THE JUNTA FOR A THREE YEAR PERIOD WHO CAN BE RENEWED FOR AN EQUAL PERIOD. THUS, THE RULES NOW AGREED UPON BY THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT GIVE NO JUSTIFICATION FOR HOPE THAT THERE CAN BE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AS EARLY AS 1981, AS SOME OBSERVERS HAD ANTICIPATED--AT LEAST IF THE GAME IS PLAYED ACCORDING TO THESE GROUND RULES.

3. THE MODIFICATION IN THE BASIC DOCUMENTS, AS THUS FAR REVEALED, APPEAR TO BE INCOMPLETE IN MANY DETAILS. THEY MAKE NO MENTION FOR EXAMPLE OF THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS
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OF CABINET MINISTERS. PRESUMABLY, THIS SIGNIFIES THAT THE POWER TO APPOINT CABINET MINISTERS REMAINS SOLELY IN THE HANDS OF THE PRESIDENT, BUT THIS IS STILL UNCLEAR.

4. THERE IS OTHER EVIDENCE THAT NOT ALL THE SO CALLED "GRAY AREAS" IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRESIDENCY AND THE JUNTA HAVE BEEN CLARIFIED WHICH LENDS SUPPORT TO OUR SUSPICION THAT IMPORTANT DECISIONS WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN RESOLVED BY NOW ARE STILL PENDING. THESE INCLUDE:

A. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE TRIPARTITE JUNTA CONSTITUTES A COLLECTIVE CHIEF OF STATE AND THAT THE PRESIDENT, WHO IS THE CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT, IS TECHNICALLY SUBORDINATE. THERE REMAINS THE QUESTION OF WHO TAKES PRECEDENCE WHEN ONLY THE PRESIDENT AND ONE OF THE JUNTA MEMBERS IS IN THE SAME ROOM. THIS IS A PROTOCOLARLY QUESTION, BUT IT IS NOT WITHOUT ITS POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

B. THERE IS ALSO THE QUESTION OF WHO TAKES PRECEDENCE WITHIN THE JUNTA. THE NAVY AND THE AIR FORCE SEEM TO FAVOR A 6 MONTH ROTATING CHAIRMANSHIP AND VIOLA APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE FIRST TURN. VIOLA HAS

BEEN TAKING THE LEAD POSITION ON CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS,
BUT REPORTEDLY HE IS CONSULTING THE ARMY COMMAND WHETHER
THE CHAIR SHOULD BE ROTATIVE OR NOT.

C. PRESIDENT VIDELAS INAUGURAL MESSAGE TO THE
NATION ON AUGUST 1 WAS A DISAPPOINTMENT TO MANY WHO HOPED
THAT HE WOULD BE MORE FORTHCOMING ABOUT GOVERNMENT PLANS
FOR A "POLITICAL DIALOGUE" AND A "CIVILIAN MILITARY
CONVERGENCE." IN WHAT IS THE MAJOR OPERATIVE PORTION OF
HIS ADDRESS, VIDELA STATED THAT "IN THIS NEW PERIOD, WE
WILL BRING ABOUT THE CORRECTIONS, THE ELABORATIONS OF
POLICIES AND THE RENEWAL OF MEN NECESSARY TO MAKE PERFECT
THE ACTION OF GOVERNMENT ON A PERMANENT BASIS." THIS
PHRASE IS SEEN BY SOME AS AUGURING THE "POLITICAL
OPENING" VIDELA IS SAID TO BE SEEKING, BUT AS HE WENT
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NO FURTHER HE MADE CLEAR THAT IT WAS STILL PREMATURE TO
TALK ABOUT THE CHANGES HE HAS IN MIND.

5. PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SOURCES STILL CONTEND THAT, WHILE
THE RECENT MODIFICATIONS APPEAR TO RESTRICT FORMALLY
VIDELAS AREA OF DECISION MAKING, IN EFFECT HE WILL HAVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6423

MUCH LATITUDE WITHIN THE BROAD, GENERAL GUIDELINES
WHICH THE JUNTA WILL SET. VIDELA'S SUPPORTERS ARE ALSO
SAYING THAT NOW THAT HE CAN DEVOTE HIS UNDIVIDED ATTENTION

TO THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH, THE TEMPO OF GOVERNMENT DECISION-
MAKING WILL PICK UP. HOWEVER, THREE BASIC POINTS ARE
APPARENT:

A. THERE IS STILL A TRIPARTITE MILITARY STEWARD-
SHIP OVER THE PRESIDENT. HOW MUCH THE JUNTA WILL INTERVENE
IN THE DAILY AFFAIRS OF THE VIDELA GOVERNMENT REMAINS TO
BE SEEN. THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF NATIONAL SECURITY
AND DEFENSE WILL BE THE AREA OF COMPETENCE OF THE NEW
MILITARY COMMITTEE, WHICH INCLUDES THE THREE JUNTA MEMBERS
AND VIDELA. VIDELA REPORTEDLY WILL HAVE VOICE BUT NOT
VOTE IN COMMITTEE DECISIONS.

B. THE TRIPARTITE MILITARY DECISION-MAKING
PROCESS HAS PROVEN TO BE VERY CUMBERSOME AND SLOW MOVING.
FUNDAMENTAL DECISIONS OF POLICY HAVE BEEN HELD UP FOR
MONTHS WHEN THERE HAS BEEN DISAGREEMENT AMONG THE SERVICES.
TO THE EXTENT THAT THE BASIC DECISIONS WILL STILL BE THE
PREROGATIVE OF THE JUNTA, WE DO NOT SEE HOW VIDELA WILL
BE ABLE TO SPEED UP THIS PROCESS ANY MORE THAN HE WAS ABLE
TO DO WHEN HE HIMSELF WAS A JUNTA MEMBER.

C. VIDELA'S POWER IS PRIMARILY DEPENDENT UPON
CONTINUED SUPPORT FROM HIS OWN SERVICE, THE ARMY. IN
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REFTEL A, WE TOUCHED ON THE PROBLEMS VIDELA MAY HAVE IN
CONTINUING TO RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM HIS HERETOFORE CLOSE
ALLY, VIOLA, WHO WILL BE SUBJECT TO A DIFFERENT SET OF
PRESSURES FROM WITHIN THE ARMY INSTITUTION WHICH COULD
RUN COUNTER TO WHAT IS REESUMED TO BE VIDELA AND VIOLA'S
PLANS FOR A "POLITICAL OPENING."

6. KEY TO THE VIDELA-VIOLA PLAN FOR GETTING CONTROL OVER
THE ARMY SECURITY APPARATUS IS THE REMOVAL OF FIRST CORPS
COMMANDER SUAREZ MASON. SUAREZ MASON REPORTEDLY IS
RESISTING PRESSURE TO EITHER ACCEPT THE IADB JOB IN
WASHINGTON OR RESIGN BEFORE THE YEAR IS UP. WHILE VIDELA
SUPPORTERS SEE THE VIOLA SELECTION AS ARMY CHIEF AS PROOF
THAT VIDELA'S GAME PLAN IS ON THE TRACKS, THE EMPHASIS
IN POLITICAL CIRCLES IS ON THE FACT THAT IT WAS A SPLIT
DECISION. OUR INFORMATION VARIES AS TO WHETHER THE VOTE
IN THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND WAS 4 FOR VIOLA (VIOLA, VAQUERO,
GALTIERI AND URRICARIET), 3 AGAINST (SUAREZ MASON,
RIVEROS AND HARGUINDEGUY) AND 2 ABSTENTIONS (MENENDEZ
AND LAIDLAW) OR WHETHER IT WAS 5 TO 4 AGAINST VIOLA WITH
VIDELA IN EFFECT OVERRIDING THE MAJORITY CONSENSUS. IN
ANY CASE IT IS APPARENT THAT VIOLA DOES NOT HAVE THE
UNDIVIDED SUPPORT OF THE CORPS COMMANDERS, WHERE THE
REAL POWER OF THE ARMY RESIDES. ACCORDING TO A CASA
ROSADA SOURCE, THIRD CORPS COMMANDER GENERAL MENENDEZ
ABSTAINED FROM SUPPORTING EITHER VIOLA OR SUAREZ MASON,
INSTEAD SUGGESTING "A THIRD WAY" (I.E. HIMSELF). IF

TRUE, IT IS NO SURPRISE THERE ARE REPORTS THAT VIOLA IS RESISTING FRONTRUNNER CANDIDATE MENENDEZ AS HIS CHIEF OF STAFF AND THAT INSTEAD GENERAL URRICARIET IS NOW THE MAN VIOLA HOPES TO PUT IN THE JOB. UNTIL VIOLA CAN RESOLVE THE NEW CORPS COMMANDER DESIGNATIONS, VIDELA CANNOT BRING ABOUT THE CHANGES HE WISHES TO MAKE IN HIS
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CABINET WHICH, TO THE DEGREE HE HAS CIVILIAN CANDIDATES IN MIND, REINFORCE THE AURA OF "OPENING" AND "DIALOGUE."

7. THE SECRETARIES GENERAL OF THE ARMY, NAVY AND AIR FORCE ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN WORK NEXT MONTH ON A COMMON POLITICAL PLAN FOR MOVING THE COUNTRY TOWARDS CONSTITUTIONAL RESTORATION. THE BASIC DOCUMENTS TO BE "COMPATIBILIZED" ARE THE NAVY'S "CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PROCESS FOR INSTITUTIONALIZATION" PREPARED IN NOVEMBER 1977, THE ARMY'S "BASIS FOR THE PROPOSAL FOR NATIONAL UNITY" FINISHED IN MARCH 1978, AND THE AIR FORCE PROJECT CALLED "POLITICAL BASIS FOR THE NATIONAL REORGANIZATION", WHICH WAS COMPLETED A FEW WEEKS AGO. REPORTEDLY, THERE ARE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE AIR FORCE AND ARMY PROJECTS. THE AIR FORCE PLAN REPORTEDLY CALLS FOR AN INSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS VERY SIMILAR TO THAT UNDERTAKEN BY THE BRAZILIAN MILITARY REGIME STARTING WITH MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS WITH CAREFULLY SANITIZED CANDIDATES AND MOVING THE COUNTRY GRADUALLY TOWARDS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THE ARMY AND THE CASA ROSADA REPORTEDLY LEAN TOWARDS A NATIONAL DIALOGUE FIRST ABOUT WHAT SHAPE A CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE AND THEN, ONCE THE MILITARY HAS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT THE VARIOUS SCHOOLS OF OPINION, THE REGIME SHOULD DICTATE THE NEW GROUND RULES BY DECREE (PERHAPS RATIFIED BY A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY). PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SOURCES ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SERVICE POLITICAL PLANS CAN BE WORKED OUT BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR, BUT THIS AGAIN REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

8. ADMIRAL MASSERA CONTINUES TO HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL AS A SPOILER FOR ANY INTITUTIONAL PLAN THAT THE THREE SERVICES CAN AGREE UPON. STILL SCHEDULED TO RETIRE WITHIN A MONTH, MASSERA HAS BEEN STUMPING AROUND THE COUNTRY WITH A SERIES OF HARD-HITTING POLITICAL SPEECHES. IN AN AUGUST 11 SPEECH IN CORDOBA, MASSERA CLEARLY BROADCAST THAT HE INTENDS TO CONPINUE PLAYING A POLITICAL ROLE AFTER RETIRING FROM THE
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NAVY. IN EFFECT, HE HAS ALREADY INITIATED HIS POLITICAL CAMPAIGN. MANY BELIEVE MASSERA WILL BE DEAD POLITICALLY AS SOON AS HE TAKES OFF HIS UNIFORM, BUT THIS TOO REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

9. THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS THAT ADMIRAL LAMBRUSCHINI HAS NOT RECOVERED FROM HIS RECENT FAMILY TRAGEDY AND THAT HE MIGHT EITHER POSTPONE HIS ASSUMPTION OF THE NAVY COMMAND OR EVEN TURN IT DOWN. LAMBRUSCHINI, HOWEVER, DENIED THESE REPORTS THE OTHER DAY AND SAID HE WAS PREPARED TO TAKE OVER THANKS TO THE MORAL SUPPORT HE HAS RECEIVED IN THE FORM OF WIDESPREAD DENUNCIATIONS OF THE ATTACK ON HIS RESIDENCE WHICH CAUSED THE DEATH OF HIS 15-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER.
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